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Abstract: In her article "Photography in Wang's *Chang Hen Ge* (*Song of Everlasting Sorrow*)" Hong Zeng analyzes Wang's novel in the context of imagery following the theoretical framework of photography as proposed in the work of Xun Lu and Roland Barthes. According to both Xun Lu and Roland Barthes, the spectacle of photography is tied to the notion of the "the theater of the dead." Further, according to Walter Benjamin, photography is linked with the motif of exile: it is the estrangement between self and image under the spotlight, the daily enlarged disparity between the perennial life preserved by the photograph and the reality of the corporeal being subject to the erosion of time. Wang's novel features a protagonist whose nostalgia for the beauty of 1930s Shanghai gradually loses her contact with reality in the contemporary world. Zeng's analysis with the notion of photography as postulated by Xun Lu and Barthes suggests that the novel's central perspective of exile, death, images of the past, and the divorce of body and image results in the protagonist's sense of loss of reality.

Hong ZENG

Photography in Wang's *Chang Hen Ge* (*The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*)

In my analysis of Anyi Wang's novel *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow: A Novel of Shanghai* (*Chang Hen Ge*. Trans. Michael Berry and Susan Chan Egan), I postulate that photography is linked intimately to death. The photographed is reduced to a flickering appearance formed in the dark box (a miniature coffin), deprived of corporeality, stilled, and these effects are analogous to the effect of death. Xun Lu associates photography with witchcraft, which robs the photographed of his/her spiritual essence so that the photographed, without his "vital breath," is also maimed physically maimed (Xun Lu 185-95). According to Roland Barthes, photography's origin is traced back to theater (instead of painting, as assumed) through a singular intermediary, namely by way of death. Barthes suggests that there is an original relation between theater and the cult of the dead: the first actors separated themselves from the community by playing the role of the dead, which left its trace in the whitened bust of the totemic theater, the man with painted faces in Chinese theater, the rice-paste make up of the Indian Cathakali, and or the Japanese No mask and it is the same relationship in photography. However, "life-like" we strive to make it and the frenzy to be lifelike can only be our mystical denial of death: photography is primitive theater, a kind of *tableau vivant*, a figuration of motionlessness and a made up face beneath which we see the dead (Barthes 31). The "spectacle" of theater and photography refers us, etymologically, to the notion of "specter," namely the returning of the dead (Barthes 9). Thus, in terms of narration, we might analogize the novel of nostalgia to the returning of the dead and perceive a hidden parallelism between body and text, a place where eroticism entwined with mourning becomes a characteristic trope of the novel of nostalgia.

At the beginning of her novel Wang depicts a section of the city, the Shanghai Lane, from a bird's eye's view: "Coming up over the *Longtang* rooftops, the sun shoots out its belabored rays — a majestic sight pieced together from countless minute fragments, an immense power born of immeasurable patience" (Wang 8; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine). Thus, Wang encases her narrative in pictoralism, an expression of and about space. In *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, photography in its multifarious symbolism, serves as a hidden yet converging technique through which the motifs typical of novels of nostalgia — exile, mourning, and lyric time — are refracted. The novel starts with Qiyao's initiation to the camera at a film company. After failing to be an actor, she is invited to pose for pictures in the magazine *Shanghai Life* and this event makes her famous. She is chosen third beauty in the Shanghai beauty contest, an event that triggers her doom. Her most persistent lover, Mr Chen, is an enthusiastic photographer and her intermittent connection with him covers the Longest narration of time in the novel. The unease and disorientation Qiyao feels in front of the camera when she tries acting roles resembles to Walter Benjamin's understanding of acting in cinema: "The film actor feels as if in exile — exiled not only from the stage but also from himself. With a vague sense of discomfort he feels inexplicable emptiness: his body loses corporeality, it evaporates, it is deprived of reality, life, voice, and the noises of his moving about, in order to be changed into a mute image, flickering an instant on the screen, then vanishing into silence. … The projector will play with his shadow before the public, and he himself must be content to play before the camera" (Benjamin 229). The isolation of the photographed in the spotlight in front of the incomprehensible mechanism of camera figures the theme of exile: an estrangement (*Verfremdung*) from one's accustomed (social) milieu. Unlike many native soil writers, the exile that Wang depicts is not geographical displacement, but a psychological one: The exile Wang experiences is more painful than what David Wang terms "imaginary nostalgia" of expatriates: in the inexplicable vicissitudes of history, Qiyao becomes an exile in her own city and with her death the city is envisioned as the wreckage of a sunken ship.

The gap between image and corporeality of the photographed informs the progression of the novel where the photograph is the frozen form of life. As time goes on, there is disparity between the preserved aura of the photograph and the real person's susceptibility to eroding time. Thus, photography is linked with anachronism and the antiquary, the reservoir of the destroyed past like Qiyao herself. Parallel to the estrangement between the photographed and the audience, the disparity between Qiyao herself and her image in the eyes of her audience — her lovers and the viewers of her beauty — determines her essential loneliness throughout her life. Her loneliness is prefigured early in the novel

in Qiyao's triumphant scene in the beauty contest. In spite of the rain of flowers showering upon her from the seats, Qiyao feels besieged by loneliness so that she feels her dress alone is what is close to her. The passivity of Qiyao's character, in accordance with the passivity of the photographed before the mechanical contrivance of camera, makes her into a mirror reflecting the ideal of femininity and of an extinct past. What Binliang, the prominent official, sees in Qiyao is actually his female double, the hidden, helpless, weak part of himself in front of the crushing mechanism of wartime history. This self projection into femininity is narrated in Li's relish of Lanfang Mei's opera arias, the female role impersonated by a male actor (as in Chinese opera; see, e.g., Liu <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss1/10>). The relish comes from his recognition that a male actor in female guise understands the essence of woman more than a male actor and stages the ideal instead of the actuality of femininity. What Ah Eh, the small town youth sees in the outcast Qiyao is the faded glamor and bustle of an old city beyond his provincial background and the incarnation of plaintive classical beauty such as Zhaojun and Gueifei, who embody the theme of exile and mourning (Zhaojun and Gueifei are not characters in the fiction: they are famous beauties in ancient China). One important protagonist in the novel, Minxun, discovers Qiyao's concealed past through her early photographs and regards her as "a true relic of the past" who "helps him steal his heart back from yesterday" (Wang 205).

Qiyao's gradual detachment from her self image preserved in photography is unfolded through the progressive deterioration of her self control ending in the devastating indignity of her death. For the most part of the novel, Qiyao's passivity bespeaks a positive character of poise, adaptability, and tried refinement preserved in the face of tumultuous history. However, later, her emotional hunger and helpless situation become so acute that she not only bullies Sasha with false responsibility when her illegitimate child is fathered by another man, but also offers gold to Old Colour (this is how the character's name is translated in the novel) to beg him to keep her company. Her harsh unforgiveness toward Long Legs makes her almost a hideous mock-image of herself during the disastrous night when she invites to be murdered at the hand of one who has no original intention to do so. The image of death narrated as an old, dried-out, and ugly Qiyao, marks the most devastating split from her photographed beauty and points in understatement to the tragic results of nostalgia. Wang's lyricism and accommodation of conflicting imagery is a counter point to a relentless realism that is paradoxically achieved through the hallucinatory image of death. Thus the novel, through the distancing between the photographed and her milieu, the photographed and her appreciated audience and lovers, and between her actuality and her image, enacts in a frightening, yet understated way the process of estrangement, and thus the essence of exile.

Not accidentally, Qiyao's first acquaintance with photography and her *tableau vivant* in a wedding dress in the beauty contest are heralded with death and the photograph prefigures the indignity of Qiyao's own death forty years later in the uncanny mixture of familiarity and strangeness:

> All they could see was a woman in a sheer nightgown lying on a bed with wrinkled sheets. She tried to lie in several different positions. … This time they seemed to be using a specialized lighting, the kind that illuminates a room during a pitch-black night. The bedroom set seemed to be further away, but the scene became even more alive. Wang Qiyao was taking in everything. She noticed the glow emitting from the electric lamp and the rippling shadows of the lotus-shaped lampshade projecting onto the three walls of the set. A powerful sense of déjà vu gripped her, but no matter how hard she tried, she could not remember where she had seen this scene before. Only after shifting her gaze to the woman under the lamplight did she suddenly realize that the actress was pretending to be dead — but she could not tell if the woman was meant to have been murdered or to have committed suicide. The strange thing was that this scene did not appear terrifying or foreboding, only annoyingly familiar. She could not make out the woman's features; all she could see was her head of disheveled hair strewn out along the foot of the bed … The film studio was a hubbub of activity, like a busy dock yard. With all the cries of "Camera" and "OK" rising and falling amid the clamor, the woman was the only thing that did not move, as if she had fallen into an eternal slumber. (31-32)

The last scene left in Qiyao's dying eye is the lamp, waving ceaselessly. The scene is familiar and she strains to recall it. In the last second, her thoughts transverse the tunnel of time and there occurs to her eye the photograph of forty years ago: only now does she understand the woman is herself who dies at an other's hand. Thus, the vague perception of predestination is conveyed through an uncanny sense of *déja vu* or as I read it, the recalling of the future. It seems to be connected obscurely to Bud-

dhist cyclic time (the lotus shaped lampshade is a hint) of the memory of former lives which renders each turn of reincarnation weightless. The novel ends with the cycle of time — the seasonal blooming of flowers completely indifferent to human death. Here, death is intertwined with a heavy sense of fatality — the most agonizing form of mourning. The inexplicable feeling of *déja vu* as the pre-figuring of future doom recalls Barthes's definition of photography as "a prophecy in reverse … like Cassandra, but with eyes fixed on the past" (87). Photography is linked intrinsically with violence and fatality: facing the equipment reduces the photographed into a passive object, a museum object, at the mercy of an external, irrational, humanly incomprehensible mechanism — the mechanism of fate. Qiyao had once marveled at cinematic montage. In film making the continuity of life is broken into a seemingly random collage of meaningless photographs. Cinema, however, resumes continuity. The opening up of the inside mechanism might point to an outsider introduced to the cinematic operation the illusory nature of life itself with its apparent continuity and rationality. The sudden shock of violence at the end of the novel, a death gruesome in its very flatness and lack of causality, is the opening up of the secret operation of fate, which is beyond human logic and hitherto camouflaged by Wang's minute realistic description and largely rational narrative. It is as if Wang, for the most time of the book, has the narrative under perfect control until near to the end when the narrative itself also takes on a centrifugal course in the hand of fatalist forces. At the moment of murder, both Qiyao and Long Legs seem to be in an inexplicable, almost fantastic mental frame at the surreal moment of midnight: "Deep in the night, when people should be sleeping, their thoughts often wander off to strange places: they utter words that do not make sense and everything tends to degenerate into a farce. It seemed as if Wang Qiyao had successfully headed off a disaster and the story would end there, but just as the curtain was falling, she called 'stop' … and forced the action to go on" (Wang 426). It is as if both Qiyao and Long Legs are "exiled" from their normal selves under the distracting and controlling mechanism of the camera. The only witness of the murder, although not that of an omniscient mechanical eye, is also the non-human eye, the eyes of pigeons. The superimposing, haunting scenes of doom and death also cast their flitting shadow in the middle of the book over Qiyao's first sexual encounter with Binliang: "entering the bedroom, Wang Qiyao saw a bed for two, over which hung a ceiling lamp. The scene looked eerily familiar, as if she had been there before, and her heart sank" (109).

Parallel to these reverberations, Qiyao's *tableau vivant* in her triumphant scene of beauty contest contains a similar confusion of wedding and mourning:

> With the splendor of the moment came the pain of loss — tomorrow she would see the withered flowers carried away down the flowing rapids. Wearing that wedding dress, Wang Qiyao felt truly herself; both she and the dress embodied the sentiment that this was going to be the last time. Along with this feeling came joy, sorrow, and a slight hint of being wronged. The dress had been specially designed for Wang Qiyao and it seemed to understand just what she was going through. A tragic feeling built up inside her as she wore that wedding gown. Reluctant to leave the stage, she slowly turned to bid farewell and in that moment she was not simply beautiful — she was real. The flowers were now falling like raindrops into her basket, but Wang Qiyao didn't have time to look; before her eyes all was a confusing blur. She felt alone and helpless, like a prisoner waiting execution. She wanted so badly to give her all, but she didn't know where to direct her effort — it was just her and her dress, together until the end. She wanted to cry for her uncertain future. She thought back to the film studio, to the moment when the director yelled "camera." It was all the same, down to her outfit. Back then she had been wearing a read wedding dress; this time it was a white one. Was this some kind of omen? Perhaps one always came out empty-handed after putting on a wedding dress — perhaps a wedding dress is actually a gown of mourning! (75)

The photograph's adherence to the contingency of the referent reminds us of Barthes's torture of being bound with a corpse. The adherence suggests to him the immovability in a changing world that is only found in *eros* and mourning (Barthes 20). The equation of the two through photography is duplicated in Qiyao's life. Recalling examples of both Chinese and Western novels, it occurs to me there is a hidden connection between body and text in the novels of nostalgia. The wedding of *eros* and *thanatos*, enveloped in a heavy atmosphere of doom, characterizes symbolically the nature of nostalgia for a dying culture, that is, love in mourning. For example, in Congwen Shen's and Tong Su's works, the lures and perils of death are linked with eroticism, and symbolically configures the nostalgia for a rich culture on the verge of extinction. The same is true with Quentin Compson in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*: his incestuous love for his sister and his consequent suicide are linked with his grief for the declining South.

In Wang's novel the narration of a feeling toward a moribund culture, eroticism, death, and fatality is interwoven with madness. A photograph is violent not only because it turns subject into object at the mercy of an incomprehensible mechanism (of fate, which includes the vicissitudes of history), but also because it imposes on the lover-viewer the undeniable "that has been" (Barthes 94) when the referent has died. In the lover-viewer's eye, the gaze from the photographed has a clearness that penetrates the mist of time and possesses a perennial life that denies death, that denies reality. Thus, photography and its narration like Wang's minute descriptions through their realism convey a temporal illusion and leap from representation to presence. The insistence on the lived reality of the dead is the suppressed madness of the photograph. The text of irrepressible nostalgia cannot find full expression unless linked with the immediacy of the body, the entangling of love and death figured as the willing torture of being bound with a corpse as lover. For example, such necrophilia is found in Shen's story "Three Men and a Woman" where a woman's corpse is exhumed by her lover and placed naked on a stone table strewn with chrysanthemum (*Shen Congwen Wenji* 125). In the same way, Edgar Allan Poe's stories are obsessed with declining aristocracy and ghost lovers buried alive. In Faulkner too, an aristocratic spinster sleeps with the dead body of a man who betrayed her and whom she murdered years ago. In Wang's novel when Old Colour embraces the aged Qiyao, the real horror comes not from Qiyao's age, but the horror of embracing the excavated, decayed dead body. Even her room is permeated with the "the decayed air of night" (Barthes 370). Such elements of the narration of necrophilia run in a thick undercurrent beneath Wang's deceptively traditional, smooth, rational narrative, until it breaks into shocking violence near the end.

The duality of realism and hallucination and the equation of the two in the nature of photography is consistent with the fact that the negative and positive in photography produce the same image. Qiyao's end is the copy of the photograph she was depicted in forty years ago. Her stage show in the beauty contest is the copy of ideal femininity and Wang renders almost imperceptibly this subtle dissolution of the ideal as the disturbing framework of her narration. The novel's pictorial depiction of the Shanghai Lane in morning mist has the effect of brushing aside the dust to reveal a time-peeled, faded oil painting or "lifting a theatric curtain" (4). The novel ends with the merging of Qiyao's death and the photographs of her past to open "the curtain on yet another season of flowering and decay" (429). In keeping with the narration of this merging of "reality" and photography, Qiyao's relationship with men is also imbued with the duality of fullness and void. The space which Qiyao cohabits with Li is a place full of mirrors, which, even in the midst of their love making, has been telescoped into a dream of inaccessibility: "Everybody therefore appears in doubles at the Alice Apartments, in loneliness or in joy: one is real and the other a reflection; one is authentic and the other an illusion" (112). When Qiyao's liason with Minxun is at an impasse, the shadow play prefigures the future transpiration of their love: "Kang Minxun would use his hands to make shadows of animal figures — as Wang Qiyao watched from her bed. By the time the light moved away, the show was over and it would be dusk" (219) and when Mr. Chen stops seeing Qiyao, his only comfort is sought in a self-imposed enclosure where illusion and reality are reversed: "Each night he would sit alone in his darkroom, where the only source of light was the glow of a single red lamp — everything else was swallowed up by the darkness, himself included. The only things that really existed in this world were the stunning images that emerged from the fixer solution; but these were like cicada shells, empty on the inside" (Wang 270). When Qiyao confides her past to Old Colour, cloaked ominously in thick smoke, she is almost the incarnation someone who sees with a strange clairvoyance her own end (Wang 401). The confusion of reality and fiction sometimes takes comfort in Buddhist identification of void and being and thus the lyricism of Wang's pictorial technique has a definite reference to Buddhism, which is probably the only recognizable ideology behind her writing and accounts for the breadth of accommodation in her narrative voice. For example, Wang writes that "White is the shade of colorlessness, black is the mother of all hues together, they conceal all things, embrace all things, and bring all things to an end. But the painstakingly applied brushstrokes also suggest a western-style picture, because in it are people buying and selling, cooking and dressing, going about their daily lives, and enjoying moments of leisure in the middle of their labor. So, beneath the void is solidity, and a multiplicity of action lie behind the ascetic exterior" (142). Further, the identification of reality and fiction takes a note of despair and disillusion. As the film director once advised Qiyao to retreat from the beauty contest, "in my years at the film studio, I've seen my share of glamour, but at the end of the day all that is left of the cloud-burst

and lightening is a strip of transparent, black-and-white celluloid with a backward image. Talk about emptiness; well, there is nothing emptier than that — *that* is what you'd call vanity" (68).

Wang's approach to refrain from the description of historical events in favor of the narration of the survival of ordinary people is rooted in her concealed mood of skepticism and nihilism. Her effort to render concrete details of daily life has an undertone of pathos as a shield from major forces threatening to make human life and history vaporize into fiction and weightlessness. However, the shield is often proved useless. The shift of perspective beneath Wang's traditional narration is startling: a microscopic description of an interior room with people chatting around a dinner table might be suddenly pulled far into a space unoccupied with human beings or shifted to a bird's eye view beyond human perception and this effect feels like the vertigo of a vacuum test. Time also contracts or expands at will: it may be brought to a halt through a process of interiorizing or let fly as if a hundred years are lived in one year. Wang's narration to render the physical texture of a past age alive through the most quotidian and concrete details results in images of hallucination. At the same time, Wang tries to strike a balance between "reality" and imagery but fails in her characters' narration because of their blind desire for life. When Qiyao insists on returning to Shanghai after her sheltered life, she has a vague sense of herself running into the bustling world like "moths flying into fire" (146).

Qiyao's life with Li is set in a mirror palace named Alice (recalling Lewis Carroll's *Alice in the Wonderland*, wonderland in the mirror). As Alice is described as the haunting dream of ideal femininity like Qiyao herself, this is linked with an extinct ideal of culture, Qiyao's imprisonment in her mournful love and waiting reflects both the author's and the heroine's inability to escape from nostalgia. The desire for a de-realized past is the impetus of Wang's attempt to endow the past with corporeality with minutely concrete detail at the same moment as it recedes into thin air. Just as a photograph, in duplicating the exact detail of the photographed, Wang tries to keep the photographed alive but actually produces death. The description in which Qiyao holds a dinner party with Sasha, Mrs. Yan, and Mingxun is a good example of the duality of realist description, as well as parallel to the duality of photographic realism:

> Sasha felt a keen sense of the happiness that comes from devoting meticulous care to the details of living. Granted that this happiness, the product of restricting one's vision to one's immediate surroundings, is akin to that of the proverbial frog at the bottom of a well, it is nevertheless a way of stretching one's life out. Moved by this, Sasha, growing solemn, sought enlightenment from the ladies on various fine points of culinary art. They explained things to him patiently. … They talked softly and gently, and forgot instantly what they had just said. Words that vanish without a trace and yet are charged with feeling that lingers on — these alone voice what is in the heart. In truth, all they talked about was the sweetness of the chestnuts, the aroma of the melon seeds, the richness of the dumplings, the smoothness of the fermented rice, and the tenderness of the eggs; then conveniently neglected to mention the bitterness of the gingko nuts. (197-98).

In these passages, cultural nostalgia is refracted through a narcissistic enclosure — a sharply delimited space in which things are brought so close that their physical textual are caressing to touch. The enclosure of narcissism is embodied in spatialized moments which achieve a state of seeming stasis. The more humane perspective in Wang is always self-protectively delimited: a small lighted area suspended precariously in the vast void of darkness or arbitrary historical forces. Omniscience can only be achieved in non-human terms, as her identification with the pigeon's perspective at both the beginning and the end of the novel. Omniscience may become ominous too, as the bizarre indifference and dispatch with which the murder of Qiyao is narrated. In the same way as a small realm of light gives a measure to the surrounding dark, the restraint that confines people's chatting and narrative description strictly on a physical surface in these passages reveals paradoxically a disturbing depth. Already the seeming stasis of a pried-open moment is superimposed by the shadow of its fleeting and the dinner celebration is heralded by mourning: "But even the present slips through one's fingers like the sand in an hourglass. Somehow they found a way to make it through the days while living for the nights. Qiyao said they lived as if every night was New Year's Eve. Uncle Maomao said even though they were reversing their days and nights, no matter how hard they tried to go against the grain, some things cannot be changed. Madame Yan said they acted as if they were at a wake, but since the deceased were remote ancestors, they did not feel compelled to grieve. Sasha said it was like they were part of a Siberian hunting party, destined to return empty-handed" (Wang 198-99). Already the

people sitting around the dinner table with their food and talk are seen as dissolved dust: "But do not look down on even the most minute of things; for with the coming of daybreak, even the tiniest particles of dust in this world would sing and dance in the sunlight" (Wang 199). This wise, compassionate reticence probably explains the true nature of Buddhist Zen's resolute equation of phenomena (surface) with essence (depth).

The spatialized and stabilized moment which opens up an unhurried, precise listing of details of cuisine is juxtaposed with a "misty, indefinite" photograph of dreaming distance, in the same way as what the exactitude of the photograph's physical surface gives rise to is only a temporal hallucination. In many places of her description, the present is revealed only through the gauze of distant time so that a future loss casts a shadow on the most festive scene and is displaced in the narrative into the characters' psychology of anticipatory loss and mourning. Seen in this light, the wedding of eros and mourning reflects the time scheme of the novel of nostalgia: the fusion of past, present, and future which, by turning death from figure to fact, festival into mourning in its retrospective narrative, creates the timeless aura of nostalgia. The transformation from loss to timelessness is parallel to the photograph's welding of the momentary shot that produces death to a temporal illusion of perennial life. Inscribed on the photograph is always an act of death deferred infinitely and that always brings the viewer back to that early moment in which the photographed is alive before the camera. This explains the circular structure of the narrative, beginning with the pigeon's perspective and Qiyao's first witness of photographic death and ending with her own death. The moment into which time is distilled evokes Wang's choral voice that is both an elegy and celebration of life's vicissitudes experienced by her characters and her city.

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